DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 079 647 CG 008 112

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TITLE Outcome of Black Children - White Parents Transracial Adoptions.
PUB DATE May 73
NOTE 16p. Paper presented at the Midwest Sociological Society Meeting (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 3-5, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Adopted Children; *Adoption; Early Experience; *Minority Group Children; Negro Youth; Parent Attitudes; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Reaction; Placement; *Racial Factors

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the outcomes of placing black and mixed-race childrer with white couples for adoption. The two more specific objectives were to: a) identify the specific satisfactions derived and difficulties encountered by white parents who adopted a black child; and b) assess the overall outcomes of white couples-black children adoptions. The report includes adoption procedure changes suggested by adoptive parents. An assessment of the overall outcome during the early years following placement indicates that transracil adoptions are as successful as inracial adoptions. This study provides evidence that transracial placements are a desirable form of care, at least during the first few years following placement, for the large number of parentless black children. (Author/LAA)

ED 079647

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Outcome of Black Children-White Parents Transracial Adoptions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the outcome of placing black and mixed-race children with white couples for adoption. The two more specific objectives were to: a) Identify the specific satisfactions derived and difficulties encountered by white parents who adopted a black child, and b) Assess the overall outcome of white couples - black children adoptions. This type of transracial placement is of recent origin, with very limited information currently available on the outcome. At the present time numerous adoption workers, judges, attorneys, and referral sources are cautious about encouraging such placements because of speculations about problems that may arise due to bringing together into a family unit members of the two polar races (black and white) in our society (Open Door Society, 1970). If this type of placement is found to have a successful outcome, such transracial placements are to be encouraged and offers hope of more fully meeting the need of finding parents for the large number of parentless black children. The Children's Bureau recently estimated there are between 40,000 and 80,000 black children available for adoption for whom an adoptive home cannot be found (Riday, 1970).

Study Design

Two groups of families composed the study group; a group of 41 white couples (transracial-TRA) who adopted a black child, and a matched group of 41 white couples (inracial-IRA) who adopted a child of their own race. All of the families in both groups resided in an upper Midwestern state. The transracial group was comprised of all of the black children adopted by white parents in the state prior to March 31, 1969. The IRA group was matched to the TRA group on

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the age of the adopted child, and on the socioeconomic status of the adoptive parents. An additional requirement for inclusion in the study group was that the adoption needed to be finalized.

The study data on the adoptive satisfactions derived and difficulties encountered by the two groups in the study were obtained by an interview held in the home of the adoptive parents, and by reading the agency adoptive record material on these families. The outcome criterion used to determine the overall outcome was parental satisfaction with adoptive experience.

Characteristics Of Families In Study Group

Consistent with other studies (Sheperd, 1964; Lebo, 1965; St. Denis, 1969; Falk, 1970), transracial parents were found to generally have a high socioeconomic status. Since the inracial parents were matched on this factor, they also had a high status. The age differences between TRA and IRA parents at time of placement were not significant. TRA parents, however, tended to be married longer at the time of placement, were more likely to have natural-born children and to be fertile at time of placement, and more apt to reside in large urban communities.

The expressed reasons for adopting indicated IRA couples tended to adopt for parent-centered reasons; they desired children in order to complete their family, to fulfill their life and marriage, to be a companion for other children in the family, with a majority indicating they wanted to adopt because they were unable to have natural-born children. In contrast, the reasons expresed by TRA couples were more child-centered; primarily to provide a home to a child who otherwise may not be adopted. These couples generally were able to

bear children; but because of the need for adoptive homes, tended to view adopting a black child as being the first-choice method to enlarging their family. TRA couples also appeared to be concerned about social issues, such as race relations and overpopulation; but only a few were reported to be involved in organized civil rights activities, with no incidents of militant activity being noted in the record material.

Of the adopted children in the TRA group, 18 were boys and 23 were girls; the reverse was the case for the IRA group, 23 were boys and 18 were girls. All of the children, except one, were separated from the natural parents within a few days after birth. The mean age at time of placement for the TRA group was 6.0 months, and the mean age for the IRA group was 3.8 months. Most of the children in both groups had one foster home placement prior to the adoptive home placement. Very few behavioral problems were manifested by these children prior to adoptive placement as noted in the record material. No serious health problems were reported for the black children prior to placement; five of the white children had rather serious medical problems. The age range for both groups of children at time of follow-up interview was from 19 months to six years, with a mean of three years. According to the record material, 40 of the 41 TRA children were of "mixed-Negro" parentage, with only one having both natural parents classified as "Negro".

Experiences Of Adoptive Parents

All of the TRA and IRA parents at the time of the follow-up interview stated they had the parental feeling the adopted child was really their own; in fact, a majority of parents in both groups reported feeling the child was really their own within a few days following placement.

Many of the TRA couples mentioned they became "color-blind" shortly after adopting; i.e., they stopped seeing the child as a Negro, and instead came to perceive the child as an individual, an individual who is a member of their family.

One of the most notable findings is that TRA parents reported considerably fewer problems related to the race of the child have arisen than they anticipated prior to the adoption.

Thirty-six (88%) of the TRA couples reported negative responses (ranging from minor misgivings to outspoken disapproval) were received from some of their relatives when first informed about the adoption. With the passage of time, such opposition subsided substantially; and at the time of the follow-up interview TRA parents reported almost all of the grandparents and other relatives have come to accept the child as a member of the family. None of the TRA couples reported any of their friends or neighbors directly expressed intense disapproval of the adoption when first informed. Some neighbors, however, were reported to have expressed mild disapproval, and these parents heard indirectly that some neighbors made critical comments to other people about the adoption. Many of the TRA couples reported their friends were "encouraging" and "happy for us" when first informed of the adoption. At the time of the follow-up interview, neighbors and friends were reported, in almost all cases, to have accepted the child.

As might be expected, the reactions of relatives, friends and neighbors to inracial adoptions, when first informed, tended to be more approving and accepting than for transracial adoptions.

Those families having other children at the time of adoption reported the adopted child has been fully accepted by the other children as siblings, with normal sibling relationships developing shortly after placement. No difficulties in acceptance of the adopted child by other children in the neighborhood

were noted by either IRA or TRA parents. Only 8 (20%) TRA couples mentioned they were aware their child had been called derogatory names related to the color of the child's skin. Most of the TRA families reported no adverse reactions from strangers to the adoption; with the usual reactions being reported as curious stares, surprise, and puzzled expressions.

Satisfactions Derived And Difficulties Encountered By Transracial Parents

Both groups of adoptive parents were asked several questions related to satisfactions and dissatisfactions with their adoptive experience. The ratio of expressed satisfactions to dissatisfactions for both groups was approximately 2.5:1. The satisfactions and dissatisfactions expressed by TRA and IRA couples were quite similar, implying they are experiencing common satisfactions and dissatisfactions from adopting a child. TRA couples showed a tendency to cite more satisfactions in the area of human relations (such as seeing their black child being accepted by white people); while IRA couples tended to mention more satisfactions in the area of parent-child relationships (this latter finding may have been due to many of the IRA couples having their first parental experience).

One of the notable dissatisfactions reported by some TRA and IRA couples was the "gushing" reaction (remarks such as, "What a wonderful thing you're doing in providing this child with a home"). The adoptive couples mentioned they find such comments irritating as they do not view their adoption as a charitable act; rather they feel they adopted because of anticipated personal gratifications they would receive from having a child (or another child) in their family.

TRA couples were asked what they thought are the special satisfactions obtained by white parents who adopt a black child, with the distribution of the responses presented in Table I.

In response to a question regarding special problems white adoptive parents of a black child are apt to encounter, an average of about one problem per family was cited by TRA couples. This small average suggests TRA couples, after having an adopted black child in their home for a couple of years, believe trans-racial adoption presents few special problems. The distribution of the responses to this question is presented in Table II.

Anticipation Of Future Problems

In separate questions TRA couples were asked if they expect their child will have any particular problems due to race in elementary school, in seeking employment, in dating, and in forming an identity. For the first two areas only a minority of the TRA couples anticipate problems due to race will arise, with the problems cited being relatively minor in nature. Eleven (27%) TRA couples reported they anticipate some problems in elementary school, with name-calling being the most frequently mentioned difficulty. Sixteen (39%) TRA couples indicated they expect some difficulty due to race will be encountered in seeking employment.

More problems, and of a more serious nature, are anticipated due to race in the areas of dating and forming an identity. Thirty-seven (90%) TRA couples expect problems will occur in the dating area. Problems cited were objections from parents of potential dates; TRA sons experiencing some refusals when arranging dates; TRA daughters being subjected to more pressure from white dates to have pre-marital relations; and the TRA person facing an identity decision over whether to date blacks or whites.

TABLE I

SPECIAL SATISFACTIONS OBTAINED BY WHITE PARENTS WHO ADOPT A BLACK CHILD

List of Satisfactions	Number of TRA Couples Expressing Item (N=41)
Providing a home to a child who otherwise may not have a permanent family	15
Making a positive contribution to improving race relations	12
None - receive same satisfactions as if child were white	8
Is a way to live one's beliefs	6
Verifies belief there is no difference between blacks and whites	5
Leads to increased insight into black culture	4
Increases awareness of racial problems	4
Black (mixed-race) children are physically attractive	3
Increases sensitivity to prejudice and its effects	2
Increases insight into own prejudices	2
Leads to less prejudice among our other children	1
Leads to development of friendly relationships with blacks	1

TABLE II

SPECIAL PROBLEMS TRANSRACIAL COUPLES BELIEVE
WHITE ADOPTIVE PARENTS OF A BLACK CHILD ENCOUNTER

Problems	Number of TRA Couples Expressing Problem (N=41)
Helping child to understand black culture and establish an identity	12
Helping child (when older) to understand why he may be subjected to discrimination	8
Criticism from relatives, neighbors, and friends	5
Reactions of white people in community who disapprove	5
Unaware of any	4
Disapproval of the adoption by some blacks	3
Impact of black child on other children in family	2
Development of special problems will depend on where family lives	2
Inferences of unfaithfulness to spouse	1
Handling own prejudices and stereotypes	1
Perhaps some difficulty (by the TRA parents) in obtaining employment	1
Receiving stares from other people	1
Reaction of black child to being raised in a white family	1
Anticipating more problems than will arise	1

Eighteen (44%) TRA couples mentioned they thought the child will in future years experience some identity formation problems due to race. These parents appeared to be somewhat uncertain of the specific problems that may arise, but commented the TRA person may have difficulty in deciding which race to identify with, difficulty in understanding why he is subjected to discrimination, and difficulty in deciding, "Where do I belong", and "Who am I". Ten (24%) other TRA couples mentioned they are uncertain if the TRA person will have difficulty in establishing a self-identity, with some of their comments indicating this is an area of concern. Other publications (Falk, 1968; Open Door Society, 1970; Jones, 1972; Chestang, 1972) also note difficulties a black child reared in a white home may experience in developing an identity is currently a major concern in the field of transracial adoptions.

Unfortunately there has been no decisive research on the dynamics of identity formation for TRA persons. Since the placement of black children for adoption in white homes is of recent origin, it may not be possible for a few more years to directly gather research data on identity formation problems which may develop during adolescence and in adulthood. In an attempt to obtain comparative information, the literature on identity formation problems among similar types of child care arrangements was reviewed; the arrangements included black children reared in white foster homes, mulatto children raised by one parent who is black and the other white, and Oriental and Indian children who have been adopted by white parents. All of these similar types have been in existence for more than two decades. There were no studies located which provide evidence of serious identity problems arising in such comparative arrangements. Apparently, identity formation in biracial families is either not a significant problem or

the area has not been adequately studied.

Changes In Adoption Procedures Suggested By Adoptive Parents

In response to a question regarding suggestions for ways in which adoption agencies can improve their services, most of the adoptive parents indicated they were very pleased with the services received from the agency through which they adopted a child. Many, however, proceeded to mention certain aspects which were not helpful, and suggested ways in which they thought improvements could be made. The following suggestions appear worthy of consideration. These suggestions were made by a minority of the adoptive parents; whether the majority would agree was not ascertained.

1. Increased staff commitment to transracial adoption.

2. Increased promotion of transracial adoption via television, radio and press. One of the more innovative techniques in this area has been to show pictures of children needing homes via the news media (Mitchell, 1969).

3. Agencies should better inform transracial adoptive applicants about the experiences they are likely to encounter. Some TRA parents suggested it would be helpful for prospective transracial adoptive applicants to talk to white parents who have adopted a black child.

4. Agencies should subsidize adoptions by low-income families.

5. Adoption practice should be based on an enabling approach rather than a diagnostic approach. The enabling approach was developed by Hagen (1969); he prefers to call the approach the "educative approach". With such an approach, the focus of the adoption worker shifts from screening out good from bad applicants, to encouraging self-examination by the adoptive applicants and to providing information as to the problems and rewards of adoption so the couples can arrive at a decision about adopting which is consistent with their abilities and goals.

6. The length of time between placement and finalization of adoption should be shortened.

7. Adoption fees between agencies should be standardized.

8. The requirement that the religion of the natural mother be the same as that of the adoptive parents should be discontinued, as the requirement, at times, leads to delays in placement of children.

9. Agencies should offer to provide the services of an attorney.

10. Agencies should provide parents with a children's book that would be designed to help the child understand he is adopted.

Overall Success Of Transracial Adoptions

The outcome criterion used in this study was parental satisfaction with adoptive experience. Three principle measures of this criterion were used: a) Ratings by parents of their overall satisfaction with their adoptive experience, b) Ratings by interviewers of their impressions of the parents' overall satisfaction, c) Ratings by parents of their degree of satisfaction with a number of specific aspects of the adoptive experience. A checklist form, entitled Adoption Satisfaction Scale, was developed for this measure.

For the first measure the parents were asked to check on the following scale their degree of overall satisfaction:

_____ Extremely satisfying

_____ More satisfying than dissatisfying

_____ About half and half

_____ More dissatisfying than satisfying

_____ Extremely dissatisfying

The first two categories were considered to represent a successful outcome; and the study found 81 of the 82 (99%) TRA parents, and all of the IRA parents checked these two categories. A Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test for differences between the two groups was not significant. These results suggest a high rate of successful outcome for both inracial and transracial adoptions.

The interviewers also rated their impressions of the parents' overall satisfaction on the same five point scale (The interviewers' ratings were made immediately after the interview questions were asked, and before seeing the parents' ratings). The interviewers checked the first two categories for 81 of the 82 (99%) TRA parents, and also for 81 of the 82 IRA parents. A Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test for differences between the two groups was not significant. In addition, the satisfaction ratings by interviewers and by the adoptive parents were found to be quite consistent; the Spearman's rank order correlation between the parents' own ratings and interviewers' ratings was r=.91.

Additional support that the high rating of success in this study is <u>not</u> due to the parents being apt to rate the outcome as being more satisfying than other methods of determining parental satisfaction is provided in Kadushin's (1970) study of parents who adopted older children (five years of age and older). The parents in that study were also asked to rate their degree of overall satisfaction (the question was identical to the one used in this study). Kadushin found the parents' ratings of own satisfaction was closely associated with other measures of parental satisfaction. The high ratings of parental satisfaction found in that study led Kadushin to conclude adoption of older children has a successful outcome. The distribution of the parents' own ratings of satisfaction

in Kadushin's study and the TRA parents in this study is presented in Table III. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of differences between the ratings of the parents in Kadushin's study and the TRA parents in this study, found the TRA parents assigned significantly higher ratings, which suggests a more successful outcome for trans-racial adoptions.

TABLE III

ADOPTIVE PARENTS' OWN RATING OF LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL ADOPTIVE EXPERIENCE

Rating	TRA Parents		Parents In Kadushin's Study Who Adopted Older Children	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Extremely satisfying	72	88	110	66
More satisfying than dissatisfying	9	11	33	20
About half and half	1	1	12	7
More dissatisfying than satisfying	--	--	8	5
Extremely dissatisfying	--	--	3	2
Total	82	100	166	100

The third measure used to assess overall satisfaction was the Adoption Satisfaction Scale, a checklist form in which the parents rated their degree of satisfaction with certain characteristics of the child and with specific aspects of their adoptive experience. The underlying assumption is that overall

satisfaction is a composite of specific satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the adoptive experience. In a comparison field, measuring marital success, a number of marital satisfaction instruments have been developed (Bowerman, 1964), based on the similar assumption that overall satisfaction with one's marriage is a composite of specific satisfactions and dissatisfactions. The possible total score on the Adoption Satisfaction Scale ranged from a minimum of 24 points to a maximum of 98 points. The mean score achieved by both TRA husbands and wives was 92.1; IRA husbands achieved a mean of 91.9 and IRA wives a mean of 92.2. These mean scores are almost identical, suggesting the overall level of satisfaction for these four subgroups is similar. A Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks test of differences found no significant difference in satisfaction scores between TRA and IRA couples. The second notable feature of the mean scores is their high level, indicating a high degree of overall satisfaction with the adoptive experience.

Thus, the three measures of parental satisfaction used in this study are consistent in showing a high level of overall satisfaction with adoptive experience by both TRA and IRA parents; with the level of satisfaction for the TRA couples being as high as for the IRA couples.

Conclusion

These results indicate the outcomes of transracial placements are as "successful" as for inracial placements. Since the children in the study group were of preschool age, the findings probably should not be generalized to the outcome for older TRA children. Socio-psychological theory, however, views the early years of life as being of paramount importance to a person's mental, social and emotional development. Other studies have found parental satisfaction with

child is closely associated with a healthy personality adjustment of the child (Witmer, 1963; Wittenborn, 1957; Fanshel, 1972). If a child's social and emotional development is healthy during his formative years, socio-psychological theory would predict continued positive growth and development. Of course, a TRA child may be subjected to a few more stresses due to race than a white child as he grows older, but such a person would probably have to face such discrimination even if reared by black parents.

In reference to transracial adoptions, Hagen (1970) asks the basic question "Is it appropriate and right to place a child of one race with parents of another?" (p. 23) and answers his own question with,

> It is not necessary that a child and parent be of the same race. It is how a parent feels about his race and that of his child that is important. The parents' function remains the same for any child, to provide opportunity for the child to discover what the world is like, what the people are like, to find his own place in it, and to see himself and others as individual persons of worth and value (p. 26).

His view is that the relationship between the parents and the child is more crucial to a healthy identity formation than color of skin.

This study provides evidence transracial placements are a desirable form of care, at least during the first few years following placement, for the large number of parentless black children.

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